

Our senior citizens and elderly are an important part of the fabric of our nation and I am committed to ensuring they have the best care, nutrition and resources available. I believe it is important to treat our seniors with respect and take care of them just as they took care of us. From the rising costs of health care and prescription drugs to a struggling economy, there are numerous issues that face our seniors today. Specifically, protecting Medicare and Social Security, and working to protect seniors and increase their quality of life has been a top priority of mine since coming to Congress.

Preserving Social Security

I have dedicated my time in Congress to helping protect the financial security of senior citizens in New York's 24th Congressional District, home to more Social Security recipients than any other district in the state.

I am fully committed to reducing our nation's deficit and reigning in spending wherever possible, however, I stand firmly against efforts to cut benefits provided under Social Security. This includes increasing the retirement age and privatizing Social Security - two actions which I have consistently opposed on record. I pledge to work in opposition to recommendations issued by the Administration's bi-partisan National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, should they include proposals to cut or diminish Social Security in any way.

In recent years, it has become clear that the Social Security Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) does not accurately reflect the true costs facing seniors who typically spend more on medical care, prescription drugs, energy and housing than most other Americans. The costs of these basic necessities have increased at a rate higher than inflation, and the economic crisis is making it even harder for seniors to make ends meet. Yet, for the first time since 1975, there is no automatic COLA in 2010 or 2011.

Current law requires that the COLA is calculated each year based on changes in the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), a measurement of inflation. As a co-sponsor of the CPI for Elderly Consumers Act (H.R. 2365) and the CPI for Seniors Act (H.R. 5305), I support a new approach to determining the COLA that properly weights health care and other costs to reflect the real impact they have on seniors' wallets.

Although reforming the formula used to compute the Social Security COLA is the ultimate solution, as a co-sponsor of the Seniors Protection Act (H.R. 5987), I support providing immediate relief in the form of one-time \$250 payments to seniors, Railroad Retirees. This critical legislation will be voted on by the House of Representatives in the remaining months of the 111th Congress. I also supported provisions in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Bill) that provided seniors and veterans with a \$250 payment in 2010. While these payments cannot totally offset the lack of a COLA, they are a step in the right direction for seniors in Upstate New York.

Strengthening Medicare

Medicare provides health benefits to an estimated 47 million elderly and disabled Americans, including almost 3 million New Yorkers. I have worked to strengthen and preserve Medicare by supporting adequate pay for participating physicians - not only by voting for legislation to prevent devastating cuts, but by supporting a long-term solution to address the flawed payment system currently in place.

Despite the overall success of Medicare, the program continues to face challenges, especially when it comes to controlling costs and doing away with fraud and abuse. I firmly support measures like the Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act (H.R. 4752), which would allow Medicare to negotiate drug prices directly with pharmaceutical companies - a common-sense solution that would lower the cost of prescription medications for seniors and save taxpayers an estimated \$86 billion. I also believe that Congress must crack down on Medicare fraud with passage of legislation like the Medicare Fraud Enforcement and Prevention Act (H.R. 5044), which would update existing penalties and establish new procedures to help law enforcement prevent and detect fraud.

I am taking the lead on other measures to strengthen and improve Medicare, including:

- **The Medicare Beneficiary Choice Preservation Act (H.R. 6303)**, which I introduced to restore the 90-day Medicare Advantage (MA) Open Enrollment Period (OEP)

as it existed prior to health care reform. Starting in 2011, the OEP will be replaced with a 46 day Annual Disenrollment Period (ADP) during which seniors will only be permitted to disenroll from their MA plan and return to traditional Medicare. I am working to restore the previous 90-day OEP, a critical consumer protection that allowed seniors to "test drive" their plan before being locked in for the year.

- **The Identity Protection Act (H.R. 2417)**, a bill that I introduced to protect millions of Americans' identities by putting an end to the use of Social Security numbers on identification cards issued under Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program. Despite the fact that nearly 9 million Americans fall victim to identity theft each year, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) continues to print Social Security numbers on Medicare beneficiary cards. This is particularly troubling because seniors are instructed to carry their Medicare card with them, increasing the likelihood for accidental loss, theft or visual exposure.

- **The Medicare Home Telehealth and Technology Services Demonstration Act**, legislation that I am crafting to promote the integration of telehealth and technology in the home care setting. The innovative use of telehealth and technology to remotely monitor an individual's health status is especially critical in rural and medically underserved communities like ours in Upstate New York, where geography and other environmental factors often prevent patients from receiving appropriate care. I am a strong proponent of home health care, which is unique in its ability to save money for beneficiaries and taxpayers while delivering services where patients prefer and where their health is best maintained - in their own homes.

Identity Theft

The Federal Trade Commission estimates that nearly 9 million Americans' identities are stolen every year. Despite the increasing threat of identity theft, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) continues to print Social Security numbers on Medicare beneficiary cards. This is particularly troubling because seniors are instructed to carry their Medicare card with them, increasing the likelihood for accidental loss, theft, or visual exposure.

Displaying Social Security numbers on government-issued identification cards unnecessarily places millions of individuals at risk for identity theft. While the Veterans Administration and most private insurance companies have abandoned the use of Social Security numbers as identifiers, CMS continues to place more value on convenience than the security of its beneficiaries' personal information.

That is why I introduced H.R. 2417, the Identity Protection Act, which would help protect millions of Americans' identities by requiring CMS to stop the use of Social Security account numbers on identification cards issued in connection with benefits under the Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program. With health care reform adding an estimated 15 million Americans to Medicaid rolls, it is more urgent than ever that we take this common-sense precaution to prevent identity theft.